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SUBJECT: SPAIN ON NATO/AFGHANISTAN ISSUES FOR RIGA

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Classified By: DCM Hugo Llorens for reasons 1.4 (b) & (d).

¶1. (C) DCM delivered reftel points on the need for increased commitment to the NATO ISAF mission in Afghanistan to MOD Policy Director ADM Francisco Torrente on November 17. DCM emphasized that while the US appreciates Spain's solid contribution in the west, NATO faces a strong challenge in the south and east and the field commanders need uncaveated and additional support from all Allies. He told Torrente that it would be most helpful for Spain and other Allies to respond to SACEUR's request for additional assets before Riga, so that the message coming out of the summit can be truly positive.

¶2. (C) Torrente agreed that Afghanistan is NATO's most difficult challenge and that the Allies cannot allow the ISAF mission to fail. He said that he would be sure that President Zapatero and Defense Minister Alonso were aware that the issues of removing caveats and increasing troop levels would be raised at the highest levels in Riga, and noted the potential importance of the discussion at the Heads of State dinner. Torrente said that it will be important for Riga participants to focus their public statements on areas of unity if the Summit is to be perceived as a success.

¶3. (C) Torrente went on to say, however, that while he understands the political importance of NATO sharing risks among all Allies, he cannot understand the military value of sending any of Spain's (or Italy's) troops to the south or east because that would leave an area ten times bigger than Kosovo without sufficient troops. Noting a recent suicide attack against the Spanish Quick Reaction Force in the area of the US PRT in Farah and the fact that Spain has already lost 82 troops in Afghanistan, Torrente said that the Spanish public is well aware of the risks that their soldiers face in the west. He also grumbled that ISAF should not have hurried into the Stage 4 expansion into the east if it didn't have enough troops.

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